



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

unaware of this article also. It does not seem that Dr. Whitmore consulted Creizenach's *Geschichte des neueren Dramas*, and one wonders whether one could now afford to ignore Creizenach in any serious work on the drama. By consulting this authority on the history of the drama, Dr. Whitmore might have spared himself a few inaccuracies in regard to the medieval drama.

The reviewer does not know whether the book does not lose rather than gain by the frequent summarizing and recapitulating in which Dr. Whitmore indulges in order to emphasize the salient points of his discussion. He is certainly to be commended for the thorough proof-reading. The reviewer has been unable to discover more than one typographical error (correspondance on page 343) in the text. It is, therefore, inconceivable how the author could have overlooked the serious grammatical error in the title of the two dissertations on the supernatural personages on the French mystery-stage. In the foot-notes and the bibliography we read: *Die Teufel* (and *Die Engel*) auf die mittelalterlichen Mysterien-Bühne Frankreichs.

In spite of the few criticisms the present writer has had to raise he does not wish to give the impression that he considers the book of small value. "The Supernatural in Tragedy" is a very valuable contribution to the critical literature on the drama. It is informative, lucid, and, on the whole, accurate. The book does not make any claim to finality. The author hopes that it may serve as a stimulus for further investigation in this field. For it as a *Versuch* the reviewer has unstinted praise.

MAXIMILIAN J. RUDWIN.

*University of Illinois.*

---

*ENGLISH LITERATURE FROM WIDSITH TO THE DEATH  
OF CHAUCER: A SOURCE BOOK*, by Allen Rogers Ben-  
ham. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1916.

The aims and methods of this substantial volume are set forth clearly in its preface. "The title of this venture is to be taken seriously; the work is a *source-book*, not an *anthology* nor a *text-book*; it exemplifies and urges in literary history the same methods that have long been successfully used in constitutional or political history. . . . The object of a source-book is to present to a reader, who has perhaps little leisure and meager library resources at his disposal, such documents from an age as fundamentally explain the life, ideals, and spirit thereof." It differs from a anthology, since "an anthology aims to form taste; a source-book, to train judgment. The former is a means to appreciation; the latter, to scholarship." The source-book differs again from an text-book because it forsakes a method which, says Professor

Benham, "is characteristic of nearly all the text-books that I have seen: to arrange in chronological order the author's more or less personal opinions of English writers. The chronological order is almost always the sole historical brand on the book." Only one chronological division is admitted into the present volume; the separation of Anglo-Saxon from Middle English. The selections claim chief space; a considerable amount of explanatory text serves to give them their proper setting. There are also footnotes for the elucidation of points too specialized for the main commentary. The material is classified under the following grand divisions: The Political Background, Social and Industrial Background, The Cultural Background, The Linguistic Background, Literary Characteristics, Representative Authors.

There are thus brought together in convenient form many documents not readily accessible, and the attention of the student is called to much that might otherwise be overlooked. The book has the vigor which comes from direct presentation of texts rather than from comments about them. It cannot fail to assist in some ways in gaining a comprehension of conditions in medieval England. But its method, as here applied, seems likely to lead to false impressions of the literature itself. And it is literature which the book aims chiefly to serve. This issue, at all events, demands first consideration from the reviewer. The more detailed work seems carefully done. Various places in the translations, paraphrases, and comments might be criticised, which could hardly fail to be the case in any work of this scope, but such criticism appears to be of minor consequence. The important question is whether the book is really a trustworthy guide for the student of medieval letters in England.

The first doubt which arises in the reader's mind is of the wisdom of so ambitious a program. Has not Professor Benham given students more subjects to think about than they can control, and at the same time, despite the length of some of his illustrative passages, too little to convey an exact idea of the matters which he discusses? The amount of material under many of his topics must of necessity be somewhat restricted, since one cannot deal with literary history in England to the death of Chaucer, with attention to political, social, and cultural conditions, changes in the language, etc., even in a volume of some six hundred pages, and devote much space to any one subject. These subjects, it must be remembered, are far more numerous than at first appears, for under each of the grand divisions already noted, there are many subdivisions. Thus under Political Background in the Middle English Period, there are selections to illustrate "the Conquest, the Reign of Henry II, the Winning of the Great Charter, the Beginnings of a Parliament, Campaigns against the Scots, the Hundred Years' War against France, and the End of the Plantagenet Dynasty." And this division is one of the shorter sections

in the Middle English part of the book! Under some of the subdivisions there is very little real information. "The Cultural Background" in the Anglo-Saxon Period has a sub-heading "Early English Ideals and Temper," not an unimportant subject for the student of literature. (p. 34) The reader is expected to get a conception of this from the dying words of Beowulf (fifteen lines in translation), from Beowulf's words to Hrothgar on the death of Æschere (four and a half lines), and the familiar passage from Bede describing the conversion of Eadwine, with the pretty lines about the sparrow and the hall in winter, and the canny words of the priest Coifi. It is obviously impossible to get much knowledge of early English ideals and temper from material so meager as this. The selection from Bede—the only one of any length under this rubric—is not very informing as literature, since nothing in the text or notes explains whence it is taken, or who wrote it. For this information the student must turn to the Table of Contents.

Perhaps, reflects the reader, Professor Benham has concluded that such a topic as this is best taught by acquaintance with the literature itself, and has only given a taste at this point by way of whetting the appetite. But it is disturbing to find that literature has been rudely crowded to the wall. Nine more lines of *Beowulf* are given (p. 72) to illustrate the position of the minstrel, and there are brief hints of the plot on pp. 34-35. This—apart from casual references in footnotes—is all. The most important single poem, the most important piece of pure literature in the whole Anglo-Saxon period is passed over in such a way as to leave the student with no idea of it whatever, and with the impression that it is a thing of minor consequence, to be shoved into footnotes. Or let us consider Cynewulf. There are no passages from his works save the "autobiographical" lines from the *Elene*, with the runes, which is introduced to illustrate the development of the English alphabet. (p. 80). Cynewulf's name is nowhere mentioned in the main text of the book, so far as search can discover; he is referred to in connection with the *Elene* passage merely as "one of the Old English men of letters." So the most important Anglo-Saxon poet whom we know by name, perhaps the most important of all on any count, is almost completely neglected. This, in a manual which aims to give a view of the salient points in Anglo-Saxon literature, really calls for decided dissent. It is not wholly a question of space. Tacitus is given eleven pages, and there is a highly detailed commentary, in nearly five pages of close type, on Alcuin's list of books in the library at York. (pp. 63-68) Why explain Clement of Alexandria, Sedulius, Phocas of Edessa, Victorinus or Fulgentius, and neglect a clear statement of the most important sources in the vernacular? Professor Benham's picture of Anglo-Saxon literary conditions is all background and

no foreground. There is so much about politics, history, culture, industrial and social conditions, and the like, that literature is sadly neglected.

We are not forgetting that the compiler's plan in this book is not to write a literary history, nor to print selections as pure literature, but to present "such documents from an age as fundamentally explain the life, ideals and spirit thereof." But where is there any document so well designed to show the spirit of pagan institutions as *Beowulf*, where any collection of poems better fitted to illuminate the culture of Christianized Northumbria than the poems of Cynewulf? *Beowulf*, surely, is a far better guide to an understanding of Anglo-Saxon conditions than Tacitus's *Germania*, a book written long before the Germanic conquest of Britain, presenting Germanic life as seen by a Roman who was probably inclined to distort the picture for the sake of pointing a moral to his own people. How is Professor Benham's work to differ from *kulturgeschichte* pure and simple if the connection between social conditions and the masterpieces of early literature is ignored? According to its title its chief concern is with literature, yet the only representative writers of the Anglo-Saxon period, according to Section VI, are prose writers, Bede, Alfred the Great, and Ælfric. The only selection from the Cædmonian poems in the volume is the *Hymn*. The only pieces of Anglo-Saxon verse included in the literary sections (V and VI) are the *Battle of Brunanburh* and the *Wanderer*. Nothing else. The most original and characteristic productions of Anglo-Saxon literature are in poetry, and these are here almost wholly neglected. What impression will this give the student? If literature is not treated at all in a book dealing with Old English life, in the expectation that a knowledge of this will be gained from other sources, criticism is disarmed, but if there are to be sections dealing with literary characteristics and representative authors, these sections should be more carefully arranged.

The Middle English period seems, on the whole, rather better done, which is surprising, since the greater complexity of the life of that time and the greater variety and richness of the literature serve to complicate the task. The review of the literature must be regarded as suggestive rather than systematic, however. In a period which includes so much as this, it is obviously difficult to present "literary characteristics" (Section V) adequately. "The Spirit of Literature" is treated under four headings: the Didactic Spirit, represented by the proem to the *Ancren Riwle*; the Cheerful Romantic Spirit, illustrated by the words with which Chaucer's knight rebukes the Monk for his gloomy narratives; The Coarse Satirical Spirit, indicated by Chaucer's apology for his own free speech; and the Persistence of the Feeling for Poetry, conveyed by a translation of a student song. These brief selections—brief with the exception of the proem to the *Ancren Riwle*—

hardly scratch the surface of so large a subject. The same brevity appears in the sections on Literary Technique and Popular Literary Types. The latter, for example, are set forth as three: the Romance, the Drama, and History. Might not this give the student a wrong impression of the current literature,—for by “popular” Professor Benham clearly does not mean non-aristocratic. Are not the Saints’ Lives, the Lyrics, the Tales and Fabliaux also representative of Popular Literary Types? In the discussion of the genres selected, the author is once more constrained to brevity. The Metrical Romances, to which Professor Schofield gives 160 pages in his manual, are here disposed of in two, though there are selections from *Sir Hugh of Tabarie* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* earlier in the book, as illustrations of the chivalric ideal. On the other hand, twenty pages are devoted to a single extract from Froissart illustrating the Peasants’ Revolt (pp. 330-350) and ten pages to a catalogue of the monastery at Rievaux, with notes on Paulinus of Nola, Hrabanus Maurus, Gennadius of Massilia, and other obscure authors.

In the section entitled “Representative Authors,” side-lights are afforded by suggestive extracts; there is no systematic account of the activities of these authors themselves. Thus Chaucer is illustrated by selections from his works describing his appearance and his delight in books and nature, by the prologue to the *Astrolabe*, by the references in the *Canterbury Tales* to Dante and Petrarch, by Gower’s remarks and the *ballade* by Deschamps, by the *Compleynt to his Purse*, by the letter of Henry IV granting him assistance, and by the *Retractions* at the end of the *Canterbury Tales*. The connecting material does not serve as an adequate outline of the poet’s career and work; it would have to be used in connection with a literary manual.

This, in a word, is the conclusion in regard to the book as a whole. It will be useful for supplementary work in connection with a good history of early English literature, and with reading of the texts for their imaginative and intellectual content, but it cannot be trusted for information in regard to literary history. The view which it presents of this is inadequate and distorted, and the connection between the life of the times and literary production is not satisfactorily made. From the title and the preface it appears a fair conclusion that the literature itself will be the ultimate issue in the book. From a careful examination of the application of the method chosen and pursued this does not appear to be the case.

The volume may nevertheless be made to render service to the student of the Middle Ages in a variety of ways. For those who wish brief and suggestive information, through original sources, on a wide variety of topics, it will make an immediate appeal. It will be of quite as much value, perhaps, to the student of history, economics, culture, and the like, as to the student of

medieval letters. The sphere of usefulness which it will fill may thus be wider than that of a manual aiming only to give acquaintance with literature, but its true functions and limitations should not be mistaken.

WILLIAM WITHERLE LAWRENCE.

*Columbia University.*

---

*A MANUAL OF THE WRITINGS IN MIDDLE ENGLISH 1050-1400.* By John Edwin Wells, PhD., Professor of English Literature in Beloit College. Published under the auspices of the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences by the Yale Univ. Press, New Haven. 1916. XV and 941 pp.

Students of Middle English who have attempted to get together the data relating to the various text editions, grammatical studies, and critical appreciations of the literary monuments of the period will welcome this book which Professor Wells has put into such usable form and, as one at all familiar with the material will appreciate, at the cost of so much painstaking search. For the first time, as Professor Wells truly says, all the available literature of the period has been classified and the facts pertaining to date, MS. or MSS., extent, dialect, etc., collected and placed where they are easily accessible. Doubtless the classification will, in some instances, seem rather questionable but as one uses the book he can easily reclassify to suit himself. The important thing is that one will no longer have to search through the long files of periodicals and the ever-growing series of texts and studies before he can enter upon some study of a historical or classificational nature, or before he can feel reasonably confident that he has at hand all the important publications concerning any special piece of Middle English literature.

One would like to know, in the case of certain of the more prominent works cited in the bibliography, why some reviews were noted and others omitted. On the whole only those reviews are listed which contribute to the discussion of the matter in hand. Considering, also, that the data found in the first part of the collection are supposed to "record the generally accepted views of scholars" some of the dates assigned to certain pieces of literature seem a trifle arbitrary. Perhaps it is, however, merely a desire to be conservative that is shown in the dating of *Cursor Mundi* after 1300 rather than before, and in the assigning of later dates to the *Jesus College MS.* (p. 375), to the *Bestiary* (p. 182), the *Vespasian Homilies* (p. 284), etc. As a whole the summaries are conservatively made and throw light on many a question of the relationship of versions and MSS. which the beginner in the